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POETRY ON POETRY:

The Metafictional Elements in the Works of William Wordsworth

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Abstract

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Abstract: William Wordsworth is one of the most extensively researched authors in English literature. Despite this, there seem to be no studies looking into the self-reflective elements of his poetry. This essay makes use of the ideas of the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” in order to identify self-reflective elements in three selected poems: “Tintern Abbey,” “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” and “Elegiac Stanzas.” The poems are then analysed within the framework of narrative narcissism in order to ascertain to what degree they can be classified as metafictional. Hutcheon’s framework and theory are used in order to establish whether Wordsworth’s poems reflect the very process by which they were composed. This essay shows that some of the best lyrics by the great Romantic poet incorporate diegetic narcissistic forms.

Keywords: Wordsworth, metafiction, self-reflective, diegetic mode, “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” nature, poetic process

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1. Introduction

William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) is one of the most prolific poets in English literature. He was profoundly influential on the course of English poetry and blazed a trail for all Romantic writing. Wordsworth's body of work includes *Lyrical Ballads* and *Poems, in Two Volumes*; collections of poetry which contain famous verses such as "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." He is also remembered for his great autobiographical poem *The Prelude*. The immense impact of his work is evident from the fact that Wordsworth was awarded the title of Poet Laureate, an honour he held from 1843 until his death in 1850. His legacy remains ingrained in the foundation of English literature. Experimenting with both language and poetic subject, his poems represent a break from the writing of the 18th century and the beginning of the Romantic Age.

In the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," Wordsworth elaborates on what poetry is and should be. Since his poems, especially the *Lyrical Ballads*, originate from the very ideas of the "Preface," one would expect his verses to mirror or at least resemble Wordsworth's theories, especially his theories on the poetic process. Subsequently, the aim of this paper is to determine to what degree the ideas of the "Preface" on writing poetry are incorporated in the poems. Self-reflective elements will be looked at in order to determine if the process of composing poetry is described in the poems themselves. In other words, my main interest is how the creative process is described through the symbolism and the structure of the selected poems. The relationship between nature and the creative process will also be examined. My paper will analyse "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," and "Elegiac Stanzas." The reason for choosing these three poems is that they represent some of Wordsworth's finest works and best describe his thoughts on poetry as both a poet and a thinker. "Tintern Abbey" and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" are quite similar in regard to the self-reflective elements they contain, while "Elegiac Stanzas" serves as a welcome antithesis to them. By using these three poems I hope to present a well-rounded picture of how Wordsworth incorporated ideas on writing poetry within the poems themselves.

Considering the enormity of criticism on Wordsworth, it is surprising that few have looked at his work from a self-referential perspective. On account of this research gap, one can only explain how previous studies have analysed elements of Wordsworth's poetry differently, the main subject of dispute being, of course, nature. Since this essay will also be

concerned with the importance of nature, it is worth exploring the interpretations of other researchers. A very common one seems to be the connection between nature and Wordsworth's religious beliefs. Mostly it is argued that the enjoyment and pleasure found in nature are signs of his pantheism or a similar elevated spiritual experience (e.g. Hartshorne, Cerf). The presentation of nature in his poetry therefore serves as a dedication to a natural or an orthodox deity. Secondly, there are scholars who focus on the moral importance of nature in the poems. Beach and Lerner, for example, look at the description of nature and discuss to what degree it is moral or amoral. Lastly and most importantly, there are scholars who look at the impact of nature on the mind of the poet. Heffernan claims that nature inspired Wordsworth to reach sublimity, while O'Rourke argues for a similar interfusion of nature and the poetic mind. Of all the scholars mentioned above, the last two studies are the most relevant for this essay. While others argue for religious or moral implications, Heffernan and O'Rourke attempt to connect the external forms of nature with the internal processes of the mind. Whether looking at the elevation or the growth of the poet's mind, it is my belief that their interpretations come closest to the importance nature played for Wordsworth. My study will take yet another step further and attempt to connect the external forms of nature in the poems with the actual process of writing poetry as described in the "Preface." This idea will be further expanded in chapter three of this essay where the connection between nature and poetry will hopefully become clearer. Nevertheless, since poetry originates in the mind of the poet, one could claim that studies by Heffernan and O'Rourke support the direction in which I intend to set forth. Furthermore, the studies above usually mention the "Preface" in passing and do not use it as a basis for interpretation. In response, my paper will analyse Wordsworth's poems from a more comprehensive perspective of the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*."

This paper comprises four main sections. Firstly, I will expand on the theory I will be using in the analysis of the poems. Secondly, there will be a brief discussion of the ideas established in the "Preface." Thirdly, I will analyse the three poems in the context of the theories and background explored in the first two sections. Lastly, the essay will conclude with a summary of the main findings and their relevance for future research.

2. Theory

Because I will be examining the parts of Wordsworth's poetry that are self-reflective, I will need to use a relatively new approach to literary analysis – metafictional analysis.

Metafictional analysis falls in the field of narratology and draws a lot of terminology from that theoretical field. On account of the proliferation of metafictional works in postmodernist writing, there are many theoretical books published on the topic of metafiction, most notably by Waugh, Currie and Hutcheon. For the purposes of this study I will be using the analytical framework established by Hutcheon in her book *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. The reason that her book provides the best basis for my analysis is that her definitions and framework are more inclusive of older texts, while Waugh and Currie tend to focus on metafiction as a more recent literary phenomenon. Waugh and Currie also emphasize metafictions that question the relationship between fiction and reality or act as critics of the nature of fiction itself. Because my study will not be interested in the postmodernist forms of metafiction, Hutcheon is the better option for analysing Wordsworth's poetry from a self-reflective perspective. It has to be noted, however, that even Hutcheon mostly associates metafiction with novels and prose, although she does argue that metafictional elements may be found in other literary forms as well. Despite largely focusing on novels, Hutcheon still provides a multitude of analytic tools that can be applied to any literary genre. Therefore, following Hutcheon's theory, I hope to correctly identify metafictional elements in the poems of William Wordsworth. However, before I move on to dissecting Wordsworth's excellent verses, I shall expand on what metafiction is and what forms it takes.

Metafiction is a very elusive term. It was first coined in 1970 by Gass and Scholes and has since "become a major topic in narratological research" (Neumann and Nünning). From the very beginning of the term's use there have been different perspectives as to what constitutes metafiction. The definition most applicable to this study is the understanding of metafiction as a "textual self-consciousness" (Hutcheon 6). In other words, metafictional texts construct "a fictional illusion" and also lay bare that same illusion (Waugh 6). It is this laying bare of the fictional illusion that separates metafiction from mere fiction. To better understand it, Hutcheon provides a distinction between "mimesis of product" and "mimesis of process" (38, 39). Mimesis of product is the usual form of representation: "[t]he reader is required to identify the products being imitated – characters, actions, settings – and recognize

their similarity to those in the empirical world” (38). This roughly corresponds to the construction of the fictional illusion. Typical of mere fictional works, the conventions and the process of creating a fictional illusion are unacknowledged and reading remains a passive affair. In metafiction, however, the conventions of this process are bared. The reader is expected to “be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking” (39). This is achieved in metafictional texts through the mimesis of process. Instead of describing the products, like regular fiction, it is more interested in the process, the writing and creation of the work. This leads to self-conscious and self-reflective elements in metafictional texts; elements that focus on the construction of the text by reminding the reader of their literary form or the creative process by which they were written, thus either implying or proclaiming their own fictitiousness. To use Holland’s definition: “metafiction tells a story in which the physical medium of the story becomes part of the story” (74). I would add to his definition that not only the medium but also the process of creating that medium may become part of the story. Thus, my study shares Gass’s original and most fundamental definition of metafiction – metafiction as fiction about fiction itself (qtd. in Currie 1).

Turning now to the framework I’ll be using, Hutcheon describes four distinct metafictional modes and forms – what she calls modes and forms of narrative narcissism. The first distinction is made between the diegetic and linguistic mode. The diegetic mode can be recognized in texts that are “diegetically self-aware, that is, conscious of their own narrative” (22-23). The linguistic mode, on the other hand, is found in texts that are “linguistically self-reflective, demonstrating their awareness of both the limits and the powers of their own language” (23). Each of the two modes can additionally be present in two forms. They are either overt or covert. “Overt forms of narcissism are present in texts in which the self-consciousness and self-reflection are clearly evident, usually explicitly thematised or even allegorized within the ‘fiction’” (23). In the covert forms this same process is “structuralized, internalized, actualized” (23). This system of four distinct modes is very useful for the analysis of metafictional works; however, for the purposes of my study, I will only be looking at the diegetic mode, both in its overt and covert form. The reason for this is that linguistic modes would require a very different analysis with a thorough historical background on the use of language in Wordsworth’s works. Hutcheon’s framework will, nevertheless, prove invaluable as the essay begins to analyse the self-reflective elements in the poems.

3. The Preface and the Creative Process

Before I get to the analysis of the poems with the help of the framework established in the previous chapter, Wordsworth's creative process must be outlined. Wordsworth describes the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" as "a systematic defence of the theory upon which the poems were written" ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" 137). For this reason, the "Preface" is the perfect tool to understand the creative process of the poet. This process is perhaps best outlined in the following section:

I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment. ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" 146)

Here Wordsworth describes in detail the actual state in which poetry is produced, what he calls "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." The central process of this overflow is the "emotion recollected in tranquillity." As described by Wordsworth, this process is a transmutation of a felt emotion into an understood emotion – an emotion existing in the mind. During this transmutation, tranquillity is said to gradually disappear, serving almost as a catalyst for the poetic process. Finally, after the felt or received emotion is translated into the mind of the poet, the act of writing can begin. In other words, in order for composition to begin, the impressions, excitements and sensations felt by the poet have to be translated into the ideas, thoughts and describable feelings of his mind. One must never forget, however, that the main subject of Wordsworth's poetry is nature. That is why, when talking about the two stages of emotion – first the felt sensation and then the understood emotion – it is important to remember that this process was spurred on by nature. The origin of the felt emotion or passion is usually related to natural objects, a statement supported by the following quote from the "Preface": "the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" (138). Nature, therefore, inspires the passions and emotions that are translated from the domain of feeling to the domain of cognition. In other words, the

sensation felt in nature is translated into the emotion that exists in the mind. In this sense, nature is central to the act of writing poetry since it triggers the primary emotion in the poet and initiates the creative process of emotion recollected in tranquillity.

Wordsworth also uses the word “mood” in the block quote above, a word of monumental importance for the analysis later on. For now, it will suffice to mention that a certain mood is produced by the process described in the previous paragraph, which allows the composition of poetry to begin. Central to the production of this mood is another salient term - “enjoyment.” It seems that the whole creative process is imbued with, to use another Wordsworth term, “the overbalance of enjoyment” (“Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” 144). The significance of pleasure and enjoyment is often emphasised in the “Preface” and, according to Wordsworth, should accompany any passion communicated to the reader. Enjoyment truly permeates all of Wordsworth’s poetry, from its composition to its message.

To summarize, the poetic process has its roots in the forms of nature. These forms inspire sensations that, when recollected in tranquillity, produce emotions in the mind of the poet. These emotions in the mind then construct the type of mood that facilitates the composition of poetry. Meanwhile, the entirety of this process is accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment.

4. Analysis of Poems

4.1. *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey – From nature to the blessed mood*

Keeping in mind the description of the poetic process in the previous chapter, one can now start to analyse the elements in Wordsworth's poetry that mirror that very process. I will begin by analysing the great philosophical poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," which was written in 1798 and published as the last poem in the *Lyrical Ballads* that very year. The inspiration for the poem came on Wordsworth's second visit to the Wye valley and the ruins of Tintern Abbey. The poet is comparing his past and present experience in the natural landscape in connection to the emotions produced in his mind. He was accompanied on this journey by his sister Dorothy who is also the subject of the last paragraph of the poem. The entire work was composed during the walk through the countryside and written down as Wordsworth reached Bristol (qtd. In Greenblatt 131).

As a highly influential poem, "Tintern Abbey" has been researched by numerous literary critics. M. H. Abrams, one of the foremost authorities on Romanticism, describes the poem as "a sustained lyric meditation, in a natural setting, about what it is to be mortally human, to grow older, and to grow up, through vicissitudes and disappointments, into the broader, sadder knowledge of maturity" (379). This interpretation focuses mostly on the poet and the emotions he is conveying. Similar themes are explored in a study by O'Rourke which discusses the complexity of Wordsworth's experience in the Wye valley in connection to nature and memory, as well as the transition from youthful sensation to maturity. O'Rourke and Abrams both focus on the internal processes in the mind of the poet. Because my essay will also explore the relation between "Tintern Abbey" and the processes of the mind, I can make a claim for the similarities between my analysis and that of Abrams and O'Rourke. However, my research will not focus on the emotions that Wordsworth is trying to convey, but rather on how he comes to convey them. In other words, I will be looking into the creative process that produces those emotions in his poetry. All that said, I can finally begin to analyse the poem and the references it makes to the poetic process.

The first paragraph of "Tintern Abbey" describes the "beauteous forms" (23) that Wordsworth experiences in nature, from the "lofty cliffs" (5) to the "orchard-tufts" (11) and

“hedge-rows” (15). This paragraph grounds the poem in a natural environment and describes the first step of the creative process – the enjoyment found in nature. But it is not just any enjoyment in nature that can be claimed to be part of the creative process. This becomes clear in the second paragraph as Wordsworth begins to describe the impact these natural forms have on his mind. He makes a clear distinction between the pleasure and tranquillity that he feels upon remembering such forms and the blessed mood that they inspire within him, as one can see in the two following sections of the second paragraph:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure [...] (26-32)

To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood [...] (37-42)

The first section describes the pleasure and tranquillity that the “beauteous forms” inspire in the mind of the poet. These sensations are recalled in the mind even when the poet is away from nature, in “lonely rooms” and in “towns and cities.” On the other hand, the second section describes the “blessed mood.” This is perhaps the most important term in connection to the creative process. It is interesting to see that it is separated from general tranquillity and pleasure. This suggests that the blessed mood is a unique experience, something akin to pleasure and tranquillity, as is evident from the description of the mood as “serene” and producing a “deep power of joy” (49), yet still separate enough to have a division of the two within the poem. What is so special then about the blessed mood? To answer that question, one must remember the poetic process discussed in the previous chapter. The reason the

blessed mood is separated from general pleasure and tranquillity is that it is not connected just with feelings and the restoration of the mind, but with poetry itself. The blessed mood is the beginning of poetic composition. It is the mood that follows the process of emotion recollected in tranquillity and it is in this mood that “successful composition generally begins” (“Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” 146).

The only problem that one faces when equating the blessed mood with the mood described in the “Preface” is that Wordsworth stated that the later mood is produced as tranquillity is gradually reduced in the process of emotion recollected in tranquillity. Here in “Tintern Abbey” one can see, however, that the blessed mood is associated with serenity. There are two possible explanations that, I believe, can resolve this dilemma. The first is that the mood is only mentioned, and not described in the “Preface” and could, therefore, be accompanied by serenity after the process of emotion recollected in tranquillity is completed. The second and perhaps the less favourable explanation would be that there are inconsistencies within Wordsworth’s work. Because I do not wish to contradict the author, I prefer to think that tranquillity or serenity, like enjoyment, is omnipresent in the creative process. In this case, tranquillity may be temporarily reduced in the actual production of the emotion in the mind from the felt sensation, but afterwards returns to accompany the blessed mood for the continuation of the creative process.

This small contradiction resolved, one can return to the discussion of the blessed mood as directly synonymous with the creative mood of the “Preface.” As one continues to search for self-reflective elements in the poem, it is interesting to look at the transition from the beautiful forms of nature to the blessed mood. It can be seen as the transition from the start of the poetic process to the actual start of the composition. This is evident in the poem as the descriptions of the landscape in the first paragraph are gradually converted into the blessed mood described in the last half of the second paragraph. The transition from the natural forms to the blessed mood is overtly thematised in the poem. Therefore, the connection between the landscape and the creative process becomes very clear. However, one can also look at the more covert transition of ideas in the poem. The covert transition follows the order of: description of nature, description of pleasure and tranquillity, and description of the blessed mood. It mirrors the idea of emotions inspired by nature and recollected in tranquillity being transmuted into emotions of the mind and into the blessed mood. This succession of ideas from nature via tranquillity to the blessed mood is common both to the structure of the poem and the actual process by which it was written. Despite the fact that the transition from pleasure and tranquillity to the blessed mood is not made explicit in the poem,

it, nevertheless, covertly mirrors the poetic process in the structure and succession of ideas. All the while, the succession of ideas is accompanied by pleasure, both in the poem and in the outline of the poetic process from the “Preface.” On account of all these parallels, it can be said that the first two paragraphs of the poem reflect the creative process outlined by Wordsworth.

It is important to note that the poem describes the emotions and mood that have accompanied the poet since his first visit to Tintern Abbey. The second visit only serves to clarify the importance of the natural forms on Wordsworth’s mind and creativity. Subsequently, the connection between nature and the emotions it inspires is explored retrospectively in the case of this poem. However, it could be argued that the retrospection also mirrors the experience that Wordsworth felt at the time of writing “Tintern Abbey,” thus making the poem’s thematising of the blessed mood not only referential to the general act of writing poetry, but also self-referential to “Tintern Abbey” itself.

Another allusion to poetic composition comes at the end of the fourth paragraph when Wordsworth writes:

[...] Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive [...] (104-109)

The notion of half creating and half perceiving the world around him is a very direct mention of the poet producing the “beauteous forms” in his mind and his poetry. The idea of creating implies not just the description of nature, but the active construction of nature. This is especially important when one connects this idea of creation to the act of writing poetry. It may be the most clear and evident admission of the incorporation of a creative, and more specifically the poetic, process in the poem itself. The poet seems to be reminding the reader of the act of writing poetry and its connection to the natural forms. Once more, the idea of creation seems to be associated with either the memory or the direct contact with nature, as one can see from this example, as well as from the example of the blessed mood in the second paragraph of the poem. In either case, “Tintern Abbey” gives the reader concrete descriptions of and allusions to the poetic process by which the poem itself was written.

This leads me to the central argument of this essay – to what degree these self-reflective elements are metafictional. To explore this idea, I will use Hutcheon’s definition of overt and covert diegetic modes of narrative narcissism. To reiterate, the diegetic modes can be found in texts that are “diegetically self-aware, that is, conscious of their own narrative” (22-23). First of all, it has to be said that in poems such as “Tintern Abbey” there is a progression of ideas and events that together constitute a narrative. The exploration of the poet’s mind and the growth of the artist is one such example, as described by both O’Rourke and Abrams. Another, and perhaps the most important example for the argument of this essay, is the narrative of the creation of poetry itself. As previously discussed, the progression of ideas in the first and second paragraph mirrors the process of producing poetry as described in the “Preface.” Because this is a case of self-reflective narrative, one could classify it in Hutcheon’s terms as a narcissistic narrative. In other words, the narrative of the poem is the process by which the poem itself is being written. To further elaborate the point that these elements of poetry are metafictional, the modes and forms of narrative narcissism must be applied to “Tintern Abbey.”

Once more I return to the transition from the “beauteous forms” of nature to the “blessed mood” in the second paragraph. On account of the striking similarities between this transition and Wordsworth’s creative process, one is all but forced to recognize the transition’s narcissistic or metafictional nature. However, the question remains: What mode or form of narcissism does this transition fall under? It must, of course, be classified as a diegetic mode, since it concerns itself not with language but with narrative, specifically the narrative of its own creation. However, when trying to decide on the form of metafiction, the classification becomes more difficult. For the sake of clarity, I shall repeat Hutcheon’s definition of the forms. Overt forms of self-reflection are “clearly evident, usually explicitly thematised or even allegorized within the ‘fiction’” (23), while that same self-reflection is “structuralized, internalized, actualized” (23) in covert forms. Because the process of writing poetry is made explicit in “Tintern Abbey” – one can say that it is thematised and allegorized as well – the diegetic mode can be classified as overt in form. Especially the direct transition from the beauteous forms of nature to the blessed mood is overtly metafictional as it mirrors those ideas of the “Preface” that describe the act of writing poetry from inspiration to composition. This self-reflection is closely related to the concept of mimesis of process since it describes the very process by which the work was created. As a result, the self-reflective elements of the poem can be categorized as overtly diegetically metafictional.

However, one could also argue that the diegetic mode is covert in the case of the first two paragraphs of “Tintern Abbey.” Not because the self-reflective elements would not be thematised in the poem, but because they are also structuralized. The division of the first and second paragraph corresponds to the progression of the narcissistic narrative. The first paragraph only paints the scene that produces poetic inspiration. The second paragraph, however, reflects the transfiguration of the received stimulus into first pleasure and tranquillity, and finally the blessed mood. Because the separation of those ideas into two separate paragraphs can be seen in the structure of “Tintern Abbey” one could claim that the diegetic mode is expressed not only overtly, but covertly as well. In addition, the transition from tranquillity and pleasure to the blessed mood is never overtly described. One can only compare this part of the narrative to the poetic process through the structure of the poem, specifically through the succession of ideas. In this case, metafictional elements are not explicitly thematised per se, but rather reflected in the covert progression of the narrative in the poem. The succession of ideas can, therefore, be classified as covertly metafictional since the process by which the poem itself was written is structuralized within “Tintern Abbey.” As a result, one can make a very strong argument that the first two paragraphs of the poem contain both overt and covert metafictional elements.

Lastly, there is also the example of half-creating and half-perceiving the world around the poet. As I have previously stated, this is perhaps the clearest instance of the creative process being reflected in the poem itself. It is the strongest example of overt diegetic metafiction. It explicitly reminds the reader of the creative process in the mind of the poet, which is closely associated with poetic composition. It does not only thematise the act of writing poetry, but also draws attention to the fictitious and constructed nature of the world the poem is describing. This is further proof that “Tintern Abbey” contains self-referential elements that can only be classified as metafictional.

4.2. I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud – Emotion recollected in tranquillity

The next poem that I will be analysing is one of Wordsworth’s most famous lyrics – “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” By doing so, I will attempt to prove that metafictional elements can be found even in the most highly regarded and widely read poems of the great Romantic poet. “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” was written in 1804 and was based on an

event that occurred on April 15, 1802 as described in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal. It was first published in 1807 in the collection *Poems, In Two Volumes*.

The poem begins much like "Tintern Abbey." The first two stanzas are concerned with the description of the natural scene, mainly the dancing daffodils. Again, this description of natural objects serves to place the poem, the feelings of the poet, and the origin of the creative process within nature. This becomes evident in the third and fourth stanza, as the focus of the poem shifts ever more inwardly to the mind of the poet. Because the mind of the poet is so intricately connected to poetic composition, one can again see the parallels between the narrative of the poem and the poetic process of the "Preface." I shall demonstrate this by analysing the last two stanzas:

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils. (13-24)

The third stanza opens with four lines that describe the joy of the waves, but especially of the daffodils and the poet. It is a description of a sensation felt in nature, before the emotion is recollected in tranquillity and converted into an emotion of the mind, which can then lead to the blessed mood and poetic composition. The fact that Wordsworth had not yet subjected the sensation of joy to the process of recollection in tranquillity becomes evident in the last two lines of the third stanza; the poet admits that he had not thought of the wealth the dancing daffodils had impressed on his mind. This unexplored wealth could be referring to the potential for poetic composition. The importance of the daffodils to the poetic mind is explored in a study by Brennan who claims that the sublime impressions of nature upon the

poet rouse his mind to participate with the “force which is acting upon it” (142). Not only does Brennan recognize the impact the natural scene has on the mind of the poet, he also rightly argues that this type of impression leads to the blessed mood, a term that I have striven to link directly to the act of writing poetry. By also focusing on imagination, Brennan’s study concerns itself with similar themes in Wordsworth’s poetry that will be analysed in the following paragraphs. However, Brennan unfortunately never links imagination to the poetic process of the “Preface.” In response, connecting the poem to the poetic process will be the main aim of the following analysis.

Returning again to the poem, I shall now focus on the description of the poetic process in the fourth stanza. The most salient example of this is the mention of the daffodils flashing upon the “inward eye” which is indicative of the process of emotion recollected in tranquillity. It signifies a move towards the description of inward emotions, the emotions of Wordsworth’s mind, which are an essential part of the poetic process. The transition in the fourth stanza from extrospection to introspection mirrors the transmutation of the emotion received and felt to the emotion of the mind, the process described in the “Preface” as emotion recollected in tranquillity – the central process of writing poetry. This is a far more explicit description of emotion recollected in tranquillity than can be found in “Tintern Abbey.” While “Tintern Abbey” only passed over tranquillity and pleasure when connecting natural forms to the blessed mood, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” focuses on that tranquillity and pleasure as part of the process of emotional recollection. Additionally, unlike the retrospective musings of “Tintern Abbey,” the transition from external sensation to internal inspiration is much more ongoing in the case of this poem. The reader is placed *in medias res* of the processes in the poetic mind. Despite both poems describing the same act of writing, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” offers a unique perspective by focusing on the ongoing process of emotional recollection.

Another important allusion to poetic composition lies in the last two lines of the poem – the poet’s heart begins to dance with the daffodils. In my opinion, this is a clear reference to the poetic process. The dancing with the daffodils can be read as a metaphor for the act of writing the poem itself. Despite the blessed mood not being explicitly mentioned in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” the idea of unity, of becoming a “living soul” (47) as Wordsworth put it in “Tintern Abbey,” is closely associated with the mood that is conducive to poetic composition. Wordsworth’s unification with the daffodils and the act of joining their dance strongly reminds one of reaching the poetic mood. This connection between unification, dancing and the sublimity which leads to the blessed mood is also supported by

Brennan's study. Furthermore, comparisons can be made between dancing and poetry, both being forms of art and self-expression. The reason this poem seems to mirror its creative process lies also in the details of its composition. The poem was not written immediately after the event of stumbling upon the field of dancing daffodils, but two years after the fact. This adds credibility to the theory that the poem is describing the process by which it was written. The fourth stanza could be seen to describe the mood that precedes the actual composition away from the scene – in the comfort of a couch, while the first three stanzas describe the sensations felt in nature two years before. From sensations comes the process of emotion recollected in tranquillity which in turn evolves into the poetic mood, the act of dancing serving as a metaphor for the self-reflective act of writing the poem.

To continue with the discussion of self-reflective elements in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," I shall again apply Hutcheon's framework of analysing diegetic metafiction to the poem. Similar to "Tintern Abbey," "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" also contains narratives; for example, the transition from external forms to the processes of the mind. Furthermore, I believe one can also find an accompanying narcissistic narrative in the poem. The self-referential narrative follows the course of: emotion felt in nature, emotion recollected in tranquillity, and finally the blessed mood. The better part of the narrative spans over the last two stanzas and is especially overt in the shift from natural forms to the emotion recollected in tranquillity – the shift that was only covertly described in "Tintern Abbey." However, like "Tintern Abbey," the poem also includes the overt, albeit metaphorical, allusion to the blessed mood in the final two lines of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." In all cases, the diegetic modes in the poem can only be described as overt in form. The explicit mention of the bliss that the daffodils have brought to his "inward eye" is the most salient example of an overt diegetic mode since it closely resembles the process of emotion recollected in tranquillity: the cornerstone of poetic composition and the precursor to the blessed mood, which is, however, more implied in this poem – the dancing of the heart with the daffodils.

Thankfully, I am not the only person who has noticed a peculiar self-reflexivity in the final verse of the poem. The English Poet Sir Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate between 1999 and 2009, accurately argues that the final stanza of the poem reflects the processes of the reader's mind as he or she is reading it. In his words, the stanza "replicates in the minds of its readers the very experience it describes" (Motion). Like the poet, so too the reader begins to dance with the daffodils. To discuss this in the field of metafiction, not only does Wordsworth succeed in metaphorically describing the poetic process, as I hope to have proven in previous paragraphs, but he also describes the very process of reading at the same

time. This transcends the mere limits of historical metafiction which I have ventured to argue for in this essay. The exploration of the reading process crosses into the realm of modern metafictional concerns, which explore, among other things, the relationship between literary forms and the mind of the reader. This only provides further evidence that the poem indeed incorporates metafictional elements.

4.3. Elegiac Stanzas – The failure of the creative process

The final poem this essay is concerned with is “Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont.” It was written in 1806, inspired by the titular painting. The poem was published in *Poems, In Two Volumes* in 1807 and dealt with, among other subjects, the death of William’s brother, John Wordsworth. As a result of the choice of poetic subject, “Elegiac Stanzas” is a greatly different poem from “Tintern Abbey” and “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” in the mood it produces and describes. Similarly, the poetic process described within is viewed from a considerably different outlook, much less obscured by metaphors or veiled in tranquillity and pleasure.

Various literary critics analyse “Elegiac Stanzas” from widely dissimilar perspectives. Clucas and Swaab, for example, analyse the poem as part of a series of elegies written upon John’s death. Their studies discuss the poem as part of Wordsworth’s gradual mourning process. Their interpretation does concern itself with writing poetry, however their scope of interest is limited only to the four elegies and not to the poetic process as a whole. A broader interpretation can be found in a study by O’Hara who looks at the impact the death of Wordsworth’s brother had on his understanding of nature and his imagination. O’Hara rightly states: “In ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ we see an extreme expression of his least typical attitude, a drastic withdrawal from nature accompanied by suppressed difficulties and doubt about his imagination” (82). This impact on Wordsworth’s imagination in relation to nature will also be explored in this essay. However, the focus will once more be placed on the poetic process and self-reflective elements in order to determine to what degree his thoughts on writing poetry had changed.

The poem opens with three stanzas describing Peele Castle, the castle that Wordsworth was closely familiar with having lived in its vicinity in 1794. This part of the poem does remind one of the previous two lyrics analysed in this essay with words such as “calm” (9), “quiet” (5), “gentle” (12) and “mood” (10). However, “Elegiac Stanzas” does not

follow a similar progression of ideas as “Tintern Abbey” or “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” The metaphorical description of the poetic process as described in the “Preface” is not incorporated in or spurred on by the beautiful forms of nature. For one, the castle, being the main subject of the poem, is not a natural form, but is simply placed in a natural landscape. However, subject matter is not the greatest difference that this poem offers. Rather, it is what comes with this difference that is of interest for my essay. This becomes very clear as one happens upon the fourth and fifth stanza. In them Wordsworth ponders over the type of poem he would have written in his youth on that very same castle. He writes:

Ah! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream;

I would have planted thee, thou hoary Pile
Amid a world how different from this!
Beside a sea that could not cease to smile;
On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss. (13-20)

These two stanzas serve as an important example of the themes dealt with in “Elegiac Stanzas.” Wordsworth is describing a poem he would have written in his younger days – a “Poet’s dream” of “tranquil land” and “sky of bliss.” The use of the terms “dream,” “tranquil” and “bliss” may remind one of the nouns and adjectives used in either of the previous two poems analysed in this essay. But unlike the previous two poems, “Elegiac Stanzas” does not use these terms as successive steps in painting a self-reflective picture of the poetic process. The “bliss” and “tranquillity” are now used only as referents to what used to be at the centre of his youthful poetry. In fact, the poem seems strongly detached from this tranquil process, as is first evident by the use of the past tense and conditional clauses when describing the fictional poem that was never written. Examples of this are the opening lines of the stanzas above: “then, if mine had been the Painter’s hand” and “I would have planted thee, thou hoary Pile.” Furthermore, this distance between his idealised poetic process and the act by which “Elegiac Stanzas” was written becomes overtly thematised in the eighth and ninth stanza:

Such, in the fond illusion of my heart,
Such Picture would I at that time have made:
And seen the soul of truth in every part,
A steadfast peace that might not be betrayed.

So once it would have been,—'tis so no more;
I have submitted to a new control:
A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
A deep distress hath humanised my Soul. (29-36)

Within these two stanzas one can see an explicit break from the peacefulness and blissfulness of the process and mood that suffused his earlier works. He confesses to the illusory nature of such verses which suggests a stark disillusion with his own poetry and process. The poetic power is gone and a “deep distress” has crept in to “humanize” his soul. Here one can observe an obvious divergence from the mood that produced his earlier poetry. The idea of distress is now at the centre of composition and the theme of humanization is a clear shift from the natural descriptions in “Tintern Abbey” and “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” It is interesting to note that the themes of distress and humanizing the soul are explored alongside Peele Castle. Wordsworth, being primarily known for strictly nature poetry, chooses a man-made creation, a castle, as the subject of the poem to complement the distress and humanization. Observing the painting that inspired the poem, one can start to understand why this subject fits so well with Wordsworth’s all-but-pleasurable emotions of “Elegiac Stanzas.” The painting of a storm looming over the castle next to the agitated sea serves as a straightforward metaphor for the darkness that now looms over the poetry and the poetic process. The peaceful castle on a tranquil sea underneath a blissful sky is now no more. The beautiful picture of his mind has been overshadowed by a distressful storm. This is in turn reproduced in his poetry, serving as a reminder of the connection of the poetic mind and the writing process.

Additionally, the parallel between poetry and the painter’s hand signifies that poetic composition is a central theme of “Elegiac Stanzas.” This becomes evident if one again returns to the “Preface.” Wordsworth opines that “[w]e are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and, accordingly, we call them Sisters” (142). It is, therefore, no surprise that in a poem like “Elegiac Stanzas” which so overtly discusses the nature of

poetry and the poetic process, Wordsworth decided to connect his profession with that of the painter. Choosing the painting and its production as the main subjects of the poem only supports the interpretation that “Elegiac Stanzas” deals with poetry and the process by which it is written.

However, thus far I may not have sufficiently supported the argument that this poem is self-reflective. Despite never metaphorically describing the act by which the poem itself was written, as seen in “Tintern Abbey” and “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” “Elegiac Stanzas” does offer perhaps the most straightforward and overt scrutiny of Wordsworth’s idealised poetic process. Unlike the previous two poems, it does not thematise the success of pleasurable writing in nature, but rather explores its failures. The unattainability of tranquillity and enjoyment and the distress inside the poetic heart all obstruct a successful composition as outlined in the “Preface.” Yet, the poem was nevertheless written. “Elegiac Stanzas” exists no matter the failure of the process. This causes the reader to rethink the importance of the poetic process that was analysed in the previous two poems. How important can it be if its failure produces a poem nevertheless? The readers are forced to question not only the process that Wordsworth describes in the “Preface,” but also the process by which the poem they are currently reading – “Elegiac Stanzas” – is written. This poem is, therefore, not only referring back to idealized poetic composition and criticizing it, but is also producing questions in the mind of the readers as to how the very poem was written. It is in this sense that “Elegiac Stanzas” is self-reflective.

As a result of these self-referential elements, this poem can also be analysed in the framework established by Hutcheon. Because the majority of “Elegiac Stanza” overtly describes the failure of the poetic process, the poem can be said to contain a narcissistic narrative. Once more, because the self-reflective elements are thematised in the poem they may be classified as overt diegetic modes of metafiction. Although most of the self-reflective elements of “Elegiac Stanzas” pertain to the fictional poem that was never written, the poem can still be seen as metafictional since it focuses the reader’s attention on the artificiality of the work and the process by which the poem is being written. Again, this is closely related to the ideas of mimesis of process and fiction about fiction. Furthermore, the void that is left by the divergence from the idealized poetic process causes the reader to think about the composition of “Elegiac Stanzas” itself. This could be categorised as a covert diegetic mode since the apparent lack of a poetic process is more internalized than thematised. The poem is an example of poetic self-criticism, which not only criticizes the poet, but the poem and the creative process as well. As a result, “Elegiac Stanzas” can be classified as a metafictional

poem which thematises poetic failure, rather than poetic success, with overt and covert diegetic metafictional modes.

5. Conclusion

To briefly summarize, the main objective of this essay was to show how Wordsworth's poetic process is reflected in the poems themselves. With the help of the "Preface" and Hutcheon's framework of metafictional modes and forms, my essay analysed how the act of writing poetry is incorporated in the selected poems. Whether it is the transition from natural forms to the blessed mood of "Tintern Abbey"; the transition from natural forms to emotions recollected in tranquillity of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"; or the overt criticism of Wordsworth's own poetic process in "Elegiac Stanzas," this essay has attempted to show how metafictional elements can be found in some of Wordsworth's best compositions.

The main purpose of this study was not only to re-evaluate Wordsworth's poems, although I hope I have achieved that to some degree, but also to ascertain whether novel narratological concepts, specifically metafiction, were applicable to older texts. In addition, this study ventured to apply metafictional analysis to poetry, a literary genre that has not been given much attention in metafictional research. As Neumann and Nünning accurately identify: "One relatively unexplored issue is the development of metafiction and metanarration across different periods of literary history in different literary genres" (np.). This study, therefore, attempts to provide a model for analysing Romantic works, specifically Romantic poetry, from a metafictional standpoint, something that has not been carried out sufficiently in academic circles.

Seeing how interesting metafiction can be when applied to literary works, it is my hope that more studies be conducted in a similar manner, looking at older texts and finding self-reflective elements within. Even as far as Wordsworth is concerned, there are many possibilities for future research. One may look at linguistic modes of metafiction in the context of the major change in poetic language from 18th century poets to the *Lyrical Ballads*. This is an especially interesting possibility for research since Wordsworth's thoughts on language in the "Preface" strongly coincide with the role of linguistically metafictional texts in postmodernism. There are also many aspects of the poems that I have not been able to explore sufficiently, such as the impact of enjoyment and bliss on the composition of poetry. Furthermore, the connection between the mind of the poet and the act of writing poetry could be researched in more detail. Whichever direction a future researcher may choose, it would be a great waste to leave so many metafictional elements unexplored.

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